

## **Easter 3C 8am – 5 May 2019**

*John 21:1-19*

Over these first three Sundays of Easter we've been hearing various accounts of the early Church's experience of the Resurrection where it first wrestled with what it means to be the community of the resurrection.

On Easter Day we heard St Luke's account of Mary Magdalene and the other women with her at the empty tomb and the men disregarding their message as 'idle tales.' Last Sunday we heard St John's account of Thomas and the disciples in the upper room. Today we hear another account from St John; this takes place beside the lake where the story originally began for Peter and the other disciples.

Peter says: Right, I'm going fishing – not let's go fishing together (even though the others tag along). Perhaps he wanted some time out to reflect, perhaps everything was just too much and he wanted to return to his old life, perhaps he felt it had all been his fault.

There had been too much change – too much hurt and confusion, too much death, and now, too many idle tales about empty tombs, and, especially on Peter's behalf, too many bold and broken statements of commitment. After all, hadn't he promised never ever to deny Jesus? And then when everything started getting too difficult, too dangerous, before he knew it he'd denied Jesus three times. Yep, let's go back to how things were.

Perhaps if we try hard enough we can make things right or at least turn back the clock. Perhaps if we try hard enough we can find Jesus – or at think we have. Perhaps we will settle for some comfort (food), or at least for some complacency.

But, of course, we can never go back to how things were (or imagine they were). Even after spending all night "on the lake" there is nothing, no fish, no Jesus, nothing. And then, when they least expect it – it all changes yet again – a bit like the mount of Transfiguration, except by a lake.

The risen Jesus comes to them, calls to them, feeds them, prepares breakfast – a Eucharistic meal – for them.

Now, suddenly there are more fish than they know what to do with! St John tells us there were 153 large fishes – though no one has ever quite been able to work out the symbolism of this number. Perhaps even better and more importantly, we're told that their net (their equipment for ministry) is not even torn.

They are so overwhelmed that no one is even game to say anything or ask any questions – especially Peter. Peter is no longer willing to shoot-off his big mouth with promises he can't keep. But Jesus is not going to let Peter off the hook (so to speak) that easily. If Peter (and the others) want to go back, then Jesus is going to confront Peter with some recent history:

‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’

Jesus addresses Peter formally, by using his original name, again bringing everything full-circle. And not just once, but three times!

In the Greek, something very intriguing and significant occurs here. Greek has different words for love which carry different nuances, these tend to get lost when translated into English.

One of the Greek words is *agapé* – which is often described as the highest form of love: love which is completely self-less and altruistic, love which is directed to the divine or a greater cause. Another Greek word for love is *philia* – which tends to be used when describing affection and friendship.

Both these words are used in the exchange between Jesus and Peter, so another way of translating the conversation might go like this:

Simon, do you *love* me?  
Yes Lord, you know that I *like* you.

Simon, do you *love* me?  
Yes Lord, you know that I *like* you.

Simon, do you *like* me?  
Yes Lord, you know everything!  
You know that I *like* you.

Simon Peter is no longer willing to make promises he can't keep. Simon Peter is finally being honest. Simon Peter is finally being himself. And it is only really now that he is ready for the work and ministry which Jesus calls him to do – 'Feed my sheep.'

And notice how the commission to Peter 'rises' in importance: 'Feed my lambs'; 'Tend my sheep'; 'Feed my sheep'. Notice also, they're *my* (Jesus') lambs and sheep – not Peter's.

This is what the community of the resurrection is all about – for via Simon Peter, this conversation, these questions, and these commissions are given to the whole Church, and therefore to us.

How often have we spent the whole night (figuratively speaking) in a boat, on a lake, urgently working for an outcome, urgently looking for the risen One, only to find ourselves exhausted, with no fish, no Jesus, nothing?

The Good News means allowing ourselves to stop trying so hard: for we will spend nights with no fish in the net, only to be to be encountered by the risen Lord again, when and where we least expect it. When we feel empty and exhausted: will be fed and nurtured by the risen the Lord. When we feel like hope is gone and we have messed everything up: we will experience forgiveness and renewal through the risen Lord. All this is so that we, like Simon Peter, might become our true selves, and in turn, we too may nurture, love, and bring new life to others.

'Do you love me?' 'Do you like me?'

And, after all this, Jesus said to Simon Peter the same words that he had first said to him years earlier, and which he says again to us now: 'Follow me.'

Fr Paul Bower  
Christ Church South Yarra